



**Public Hearing Testimony of
Sharon Palmer, Commissioner
Department of Labor
Labor and Public Employees Committee
February 26, 2013**

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak, Senator Markley, Representative Smith and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with testimony regarding **Senate Bill 927, AAC the Definition of New Employee in the Unemployed Armed Forces Member Subsidized Training and Employment Program**. My name is Sharon Palmer and I am the Labor Commissioner.

I am here to speak in strong support of this bill. Currently, the Veterans' portion of the Subsidized Training and Employment Program (STEP UP) program is limited to those individuals who have served in a "combat zone." The proposal would eliminate the requirement that the Armed Services member have served in a "combat zone." "Combat zone" is a designated area in which there is hostile fire or imminent danger and the member is serving an area in direct support of military operations in the combat zone. Certain members of the Armed Services who do not serve in direct support of a military operation would not be eligible to participate in the STEP UP program but would be eligible under this proposed bill.

The current definition incorporates a very small pool of veterans entitled to participate in the STEP UP program. Fewer veterans would have the opportunity to participate in the program if the statute remains as it currently reads. DOL would not be able to place, into the program, certain unemployed veterans who need assistance.

The current bill limits the veteran participants to veterans who have served post 9/11. This proposed bill would also allow pre-9/11 veterans to be eligible to participate in the program.

DOL provided services to over 7,600 veterans in the past year for all of our services. It is anticipated that there will be another 7,000 veterans who will be leaving the military and who will need services. Not all of these veterans will need the STEP UP because many will use the GI Bill to attend college or receive other training or educational services. Therefore, broadening the definition of "veteran" will enable DOL to reach more veterans than we would be able to serve under the law as it is currently written. This proposal will not only assist our deserving veterans but will also help create jobs and grow Connecticut's economy.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony here today. I am available to answer any questions you may have.

